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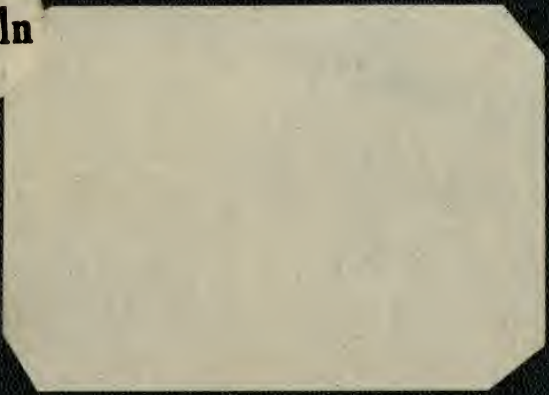

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Address by the Master of Albion Lodge on the anniversary of Lincoln's Birthday '06

A TRIBUTE

TO THE

MEMORY

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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ALBION LODGE No. 26, F. & A. M.

FEBRUARY 12, 1906

Thompson, Robert W.

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"HOW IS THE SPIRIT OF A FREE PEOPLE TO BE FORMED, AND ANIMATED, AND CHEERED, BUT OUT OF THE STOREHOUSE OF ITS HISTORIC RECOLLECTIONS!"

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Address by the Master.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE LODGE.

On February 12th, 1809, ninety-seven years ago, there was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, in the log cabin of a poor farmer, one whose name will remain linked with that of Washington, one of the greatest names, that history has inscribed on its annals. It has seemed to me, fitting and proper, that on this anniversary of his birth, we, the members of Albion Lodge, pay our tribute to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, philosopher, orator, and statesman, by recalling the great principles that he defended and the majestic simplicity of the man. His career has often been described and his character analyzed, but the story cannot be told too often. The old hymns usually sound better than the new ones and we can afford to travel old paths when they lead to hallowed ground. As American citizens, we are bound to do everything in our power to keep alive the memory of him whom we humbly acknowledge

and reverently proclaim the savior of our Republic. So, to-night, on this anniversary of his birth, some of the old things should be said, and everywhere throughout our land, in the epoch of peace and increasing prosperity that is dawning, they will surely be said every year more simply and sincerely.

I scarcely suppose that there is one present who has not read his Gettysburg address. It is known wherever the English language is spoken, and so I shall, with your permission, refresh our recollection of this gem of clear, expressive and persuasive eloquence. Although we are told that it was hastily penned on a piece of crumpled paper, and read awkwardly from this poorly written manuscript, it cannot fail to be treasured from generation to generation of American citizens as the only adequate tribute to this martyred President, who carried the sorrows of his country as truly as he bore its burdens in the dark hours of civil war.

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have

come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

"But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to aid or detract. The world will little note nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people. shall not perish from the earth."

And then we recall the conclusion of his first inaugural address:—

"Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, in the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government; while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend it.'

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends We must not be enemies. Though passions may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

And reading from his second Annual Message,

"Is it doubted, then, that the plan I propose, if adopted, would shorten the war, and thus lessen its expenditure of money and of blood? Is it doubted that it would restore the national authority and national prosperity and perpetuate both indefinitely? Is it doubted that we here,—Congress and Executive—can secure its adoption? Will not the good people respond to a united and earnest appeal from us? Can we, can they, by any other means, so certainly or so speedily assure these vital objects? We can succeed only by con-

cert. It is not,—'Can any of us imagine better', but 'Can we all do better'? Object whatsoever is possible, still the question recurs, 'Can we do better'? The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall our selves, and then we shall save our country.

"Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this Administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We, even we here, hold the power and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth."

And finally we read from the conclusion of his second Inaugural Address, when the great civil contest was still absorbing the attention of the nation:—

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations"

Who was this man who rose from obscurity to occupy the most exalted and honored station within the gift of a free people? Born on a farm, in poverty, reared without the advantages of schools, but persistently training and disciplining himself and extending his knowledge by his marvelous powers of observation, learning to read and write by the light of the kitchen fire, in the woods of Indiana, a boat-man on the Mississippi, an awkward farm hand of the Sangamon, who covered his bare feet in the fresh dirt which his plow had turned up, to keep them from getting sun burned, the country lawyer who rode on horseback from county to county with nothing in his saddle bags except a clean shirt and the Code of Illinois, to try his cases and to air his views in the cheerful company which always gathered about the Court House, the daring debater of whom it was said that his clothes did not fit him, that he stretched his long legs in ungainly postures, that he was common

and uncouth in his appearance, his critics little dreaming that the rude cabin yonder on the edge of the hill country of Kentucky was about to be transformed by the tender imagination of the people into a mansion more stately than the White House itself. The cabin of Nancy Hanks did not shelter the childhood of a king, but more royal than all the palaces of earth, it was the first habitation of one of nature's noblemen, possessing the highest and noblest qualities of manhood, spotless integrity and unbounded faith in the Union of these United States.

As has been well said by a master of epigram, his was the power that commanded admiration and the humanity that invited love; he possessed a head that commanded men and a heart that attracted babes. He leaned upon no fiction of nobility and kissed no hand to obtain his rank, but the stamp of nobility and power which he wore, was conferred upon him in that log hut in Kentucky, that day in 1809, when he and Nancy Hanks were first seen together and it was confirmed by a power, which, unlike earthly potentates, never confers a title without a character that will adorn it.

Regarding Lincoln while the important thing is of course to comprehend what he became, what he did and what he taught,—yet we love to dwell on the becoming,—the early processes, and to go

over the dramatic outward incidents of his life. He received his education from contact with his fellow men in every station of life, and by his marvelous powers of observatiion learned to understand their weaknesses and their strength, and understanding, learned to sympathize. He knew men, as only one can whose knowledge is derived from experience.

We follow him from Kentucky into Indiana. We see him at school there, in the open woods all day and by the firelight after the day's work was done. We take interest in his early manhood; we see him at his athletics in that wide, leafy, whispering gymnasium of his,—axe in hand,—building him a body of iron; and we see him in the solitude of nature with the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress and Shakespeare and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States; and who would have the temerity to doubt that these professors of his, Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and Bunyan, and Shakespeare, and Washington, and Jefferson, and the Great World of Nature, are never in the future to be in any wise ashamed of their handiwork.

In 1830 we see him moving his family, with their scant and meagre chattels, westward to Illinois; we see him on his southern journey floating slowly down to his first shuddering contact with human slavery;—that thing which he said,

"had, and continually exercised, the power of making him miserable." He is a farm laborer, a flat boatman, a clerk, a small merchant. He meditates becoming a blacksmith. He is a captain in the Black Hawk war. He becomes a surveyor and a postmaster, and finally devotes himself to the study and practice of the law. He is elected in 1834 one of the members of the Illinois Legislature and in August 1846 a Representative to Congress where he only serves one term, for he finds it disappointing and resolves to give up politics.

And now, after a considerable interval of quiet professional life, comes an ominous and fateful year, The rumblings of coming conflict between North and South are heard.

The period of mutual restraint is at an end; slavery must be extended and live, or it must be restricted and die. Positive law can no longer withstand the onslaughts of ethical law. The Missouri Compromise is repealed and the great battle has begun.

The year 1854, marks the beginning of the last decade of Lincoln's life. It marks the beginning of his ministry. Now we are to find out what manner of man he has become, and what place he is to hold in the history of the nation, and of the world. From this time on he stands always in the white light. From this on we can see for ourselves the great, patient purpose driving, the

great intellect executing, the great heart suffering. What a marvelous record he has left in his letters, speeches, messages and proclamations, models of clear exposition abounding in patriotism, wisdom and common sense !

He believed in the Declaration of Independence. He believed that the suffering, the life and death struggle of the Revolutionary Fathers, lifted them for the time-being, to new heights of spiritual vision: and that in the end they conquered not merely the armies of King George, but they conquered themselves and Old World prejudices, and inherited evils and errors. The Declaration was the source of all his political sentiment; he frequently said so. It is the text of all his political teaching and the motive of all his political measures, and runs like a strand of gold through the whole fibre of his life.

"All men are created equal," He believed in equality. In that attitude of mind under which society says to every one not, "What have you?", not "Whence came you?", race, caste, class, color?—but simply "What are you?" "What can you do?" He believed that equality was the very sun of the true social and political system.

He not only believed in the Declaration as a religion, but he understood it as a policy—definite, clear cut and practical, he saw more and more, as time went on, the spread of intelligence that lay

in it, the growth of virtue that lay in it, the increase of wealth that lay in it, the perpetual harvest of patriotism, of manhood, of national strength and power, to spring from that simply stated truth if really understood and faithfully followed. History has certainly justified his faith and we have seen his prophesies realized.

He appreciated the value of the Union. The Union was everything. The extreme abolutionists hating slavery, were demanding immediate universal emancipation; otherwise, dis-union. The extreme Southern leaders, as you remember understanding slavery,—that it must be extended or die, were demanding extension or dis-union and secession. And there were those who said "Let the erring sisters go," accepting the doctrine of State Rights through indifference.

Mr. Lincoln saw, that to give up the Union was to confess the failure of free institutions before the world,—the inability of democracy to maintain itself in a crisis. The spirit of slavery and the spirit of the Declaration of Independence cannot stand together. As he said in 1858 to the convention which placed him in nomination against Douglas. "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe, this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect that it will cease

to be divided."

Quoting from the eulogy of Congressman James Willis Gleed:—

"There have been leaders of men who awe and dazzle us like the storm. But beyond the roar and dazzle of the storm, above the angry cloud, behind the thunderbolt, is the Firmament, is Providence, is Supreme Intelligence, emanating from the great Architect of the Universe. So the silent, patient, intelligent Lincoln, always supremely sane, keen witted and practical stands in majestic nakedness an instrument in the hands of Providence to save a nation.

"Mr. Lincoln was not a self-made man, nor a luck-made man, but a God-made man,—God needed him, and God made him, and God took him." When the great sad eyes were closed, Stanton said, "And now he belongs to the ages". Let us brethern, thank God for Abraham Lincoln, the inspiration of patriotism brought by the record of his prophetic words and noble deeds no less than for the blessings of prosperity and happiness which we now enjoy, for which he labored not in vain.

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